

September 18, 1986

Dear Senator:

We the undersigned urge you to support the English Proficiency Act which will be introduced on September 18. The English Proficiency Act would address the serious problem of illiteracy among adults of limited-English proficiency. Full proficiency in English, spoken and written, is a fundamental necessity for all citizens so that they can take advantage of the opportunities our nation offers and be full contributing members of our society. The alarming level of illiteracy in our country has received considerable attention recently, and some of you have already proposed some solutions.

Many people, however, may not be aware of the extent of the problem among individuals of limited-English proficiency. The 1975 Adult Performance Level study found that fully 58 percent of the adult Hispanic-American population is functionally illiterate. A recently-released Census Bureau survey, initiated by the Department of Education, indicates that while 13 percent of all United States adults are illiterate, the rate for Spanish-speaking adults whose native language was English is 34 percent, and the rate for non-Spanish-speaking adults whose native language is not English is 41 percent.

This problem is not being adequately addressed by present literacy programs. Because of the cost and specialized training required to serve limited-English proficient persons, many of the existing programs cannot serve this population. Many limited-English proficient persons must face long waiting lines for adult education classes that often charge for services. As a result, thousands of adults from non-English language backgrounds find themselves closed off from affordable opportunities to become literate in English. Given our technological society and the critical importance of full participation in our democracy, we cannot afford to let this situation continue.

The English Proficiency Act of 1986 would achieve the following:

- Provide grants for the operation of English literacy programs for adults and out-of-school youth of limited-English proficiency;
- Make more effective use of existing resources within the Department of Education to reduce adult illiteracy;
- Provide limited-English proficient persons the opportunity to learn to read, write and speak the language, and thereby become full participants in our society; and
- Establish a clearinghouse to facilitate the gathering and dissemination of effective methods of teaching English to limited-English proficient adults.

We believe that bringing all Americans into the mainstream of society is in the best traditions of our country. We strongly urge you to join us in supporting this important legislation. To become a co-sponsor, please contact Faith Rosamed or Andy Ford in Senator Jeff Bingaman's office at 224-5521 by September 18.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union  
 American U.I. Forum of Washington, D.C.  
 American Jewish Committee  
 Asian Pacific American Bar Association  
 Asian Americans for Equality  
Aspirations of America  
 Association for Community Based Education  
 Center for Applied Linguistics  
 Children's Defense Fund  
 Chinese for Affirmative Action  
 Congressional Hispanic Caucus  
 Cuban American Committee  
 Cuban National Planning Council  
 International Reading Association  
 Japanese American Citizens League  
 League of United Latin American Citizens  
 National Asian Pacific Democratic Council  
 National Association of Elected and Appointed Officials  
 National Association for Bilingual Education  
 National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs  
 National Coalition of Title I/Chapter I Parents  
 National Community Education Association  
 National Council of La Raza  
 National Education Association  
 National Hispanic Bar Association  
 National Italian American Foundation  
 National PCA  
 National Puerto Rican Coalition  
 National Puerto Rican Forum  
 Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund  
 Mexican American Women's National Association  
 Organization of Chinese Americans  
 Organization of San Asian American Women  
 Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages